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A moving field: Greek Cypriot refugees returning 'home'

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Abstract

In this paper I explore the returning 'home' of Greek Cypriot refugees. The main text is accompanied by a pictorial narrative giving more background on some aspects of the return visits. The Larnatsjiotes are the former inhabitants of the small village Larnakas tis Lapithou, located in the occupied Kyrenia district in Cyprus. As a result of the Turkish invasion of 1974 Cyprus has been divided and a part of the Cypriots became refugees in their own country. Since April 2003 Greek Cypriot refugees have the possibility, for the first time in twenty-eight years, to visit their villages and houses in the north of Cyprus. These recent changes in the field forced me to rethink my research project, as well my initial field site (Nicosia) as my research focus (gendered memories). During my PhD research I will conduct fieldwork with both the former inhabitants of Larnakas, the Larnatsjiotes, and the present inhabitants of the village, Turkish Cypriots coming from two villages in the south of Cyprus. In this paper I focus on visits to my 'new field', the actual village of Larnakas tis Lapithou. Joining the Larnatsjiotes on their numerous visits to Larnakas gave me an insight in what ways they are recapturing their selves and how they express their sense of belonging to this particular locality. Previously the Larnatsjiotes had an image of the village that was necessarily romanticized and painted in by their discourse about loss. Now they began engaging in what can be called religious practices to transform their return to a pilgrimage.

[Keywords: refugees, belonging, pilgrimage, insider/outsider, Cyprus]

An anthropologist of the border

I am here because I am a woman of the border: between places, between identities, between languages, between cultures, between longings and illusions, one foot in the academy and one foot out.

(Ruth Behar, 1996: 162)

My mother tongue is Dutch. My ‘father tongue’ is Greek. My mother used to speak a Flemish dialect with us, my father the Cypriot dialect and between themselves they talked English and French. I still don’t know what language mainly runs through my veins. It is not one single language. It is what I call my private ‘collection of small languages’. Raised on Brussels sprouts, olives and halloumi, knowing the refreshing taste of Belgian beer and the sweet taste of Cypriot Commandaria, diligent with my work ethics as the next West-Fleming and sleeping as much as the stereotypical Cypriot, I recognize the cross-cultural habits in my up-bringing and in my daily life. My Cypriot father carried his language, history, stories and myths along in a magical box to Belgium and since then has opened this box each day. He shares Greek popular wisdom with us while having a family lunch and he tries to grow olive trees in Flemish earth. In every single sentence I hear his longing to return to his village Larnakas tis Lapithou.¹ Whenever we travelled and saw something overwhelmingly beautiful my Larnatsjiotis-father compared it to Larnakas: ‘It is breath-takingly beautiful. Just like my village.’ He compares a Nepalese rural village, a British field and a French mountain with Larnakas. When it is beautiful, it is ‘like Larnakas’.

Mia fora kai ena kairo (once upon a time)... The traditional start of a Greek fairy-tale. This is how I thought about Larnakas tis Lapithou, as a place from a fairy-tale. I imagined this village as a celestial place as such only exists in fairy-tales. My initial images of the village were shaped through the memories of my Cypriot family and especially through the stories my father told me. An anthropologist, as a participant-observer, should be engaged and detached at the same time. Since I am carrying out fieldwork in a community which I have known my whole life, there has not been the usual distance between me as an anthropologist and the Larnatsjiotes as my informants. Whether I wanted it or not, the Larnatsjiotes perceived me as a Larnatsjiotissa, sometimes ignoring and sometimes emphasizing my Belgian roots. My experiences with doing fieldwork on Cyprus cannot be separated from the emotions of my family, my own emotions and my research. As long as I do research on Cyprus I will always position myself somewhere *in-between*, as ethnography itself is an *in-between*.² My field journal reflects vividly my fear of falling into the margins of one extreme, becoming a complete insider, or a complete outsider. Quite often I feel like Janus, a person with two ‘identities’. I struggle not quite knowing who *they* want me to be today, let alone that *I* know who I am today: a Cypriot girl or a European anthropologist, or something *in-between*.

During my ethnographic fieldwork with the Larnatsjiotes the image of the village transformed in my mind.³ It took strange shapes, the setting of a fairy-tale faded and it became a more realistic image. However it remained an image of an inaccessible village. For all of my life—I was born after the 1974 invasion—I have heard what we would do if we could go to Larnakas tis Lapithou. What we would see, smell, touch and eat.

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1. Larnakas tis Lapithou is a small village in the occupied north of Cyprus. It lies 17 kilometres west of Kyrenia on the southern foot of the Pendaktylos mountain. Before 1974 it was an exclusively Greek community with 873 inhabitants. Since the Turkish invasion and the consequent displacement of thousands of Cypriots, the Larnatsjiotes live everywhere on the island; the larger part in the suburbs of the capital Nicosia. Nowadays the village is called Kozan(köy) by the Turkish Cypriot refugees who are living there. They come from two villages in the Paphos district: Akoursos and Kritoutera.
 2. What is it exactly that anthropologists write? Behar (1995:3) defines it as ‘a strange cross between the realist novel, the travel account, the memoir and the scientific report’.
 3. In 2002 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with the former inhabitants of the village Larnakas tis Lapithou. My research was about memories, village life and refugees. About all sorts of movements: in time, in space, in memory and in future. It was about travelling from Belgium to Cyprus, from Nicosia to Larnakas tis Lapithou, from home to home, from now to before.

What we would do if we could cross the border. Here is what a Larnatsjiotissa would do when she would be able to return:

I would like to climb the Pendadaktylos again, which overlooks Vassilia, Kyrenia, Lapithos,... I remember that on my right I could see Vassilia, Lapithos... All those beautiful places (*tous oraious topous*). I have never seen such scenery anywhere else. From the other side we could see as far as Lefkosia.⁴ Imagine watching all those villages as far as Lefkosia. You know, this is the first thing I want to go to (*ma kseris en to proton praman pou thelo na pao*). I want to go up the mountain and enjoy the view again. I have never seen this anywhere else in Cyprus (*Poupote allou stin kipro en ida opou epia*). (Maria, 67)

The Larnatsjiotes had partly become *Lefkosiates*, knowing their neighbourhoods in the capital as well as their village. Creating their own Larnakas in their mind, consciously and unconsciously acting out of memory. Their children are Lefkosiates and grew up in a divided city, where their country 'ends' at the Green Line. When I did my fieldwork, in 2002, I never expected nor believed that the Green Line would ever open, as the *Lacharopetra* in Larnakas tis Lapithou never opened in reality, only in the Larnatsjiotes' favourite myth.⁵ But the story about the Green Line is not a myth; indeed it is a daily reality. Daily realities can change, as July 1974 interrupted village life, April 2003 interrupted, in a certain way, 'refugee life'. Since Friday 13 December 2002 Cyprus has an official entrance ticket to the European Union. From that day on more peace talks were held, the 'Anan plan' was discussed, Turkish Cypriots demonstrated regularly for the first time since 1974, but *To Kypriako* remained the same.⁶ Until Wednesday 23 April 2003. From one day to the next everything changed. Cypriots could cross from one side of their divided island to the other for the first time in almost thirty years. Two weeks later thousands of Greek and Turkish Cypriots crossed the Green Line and went to their villages and houses.

I often wondered what it would be like to go to Larnakas, to finally see 'my field' which is not 'my field', to see 'our house' which is not 'our house'. As an anthropologist it was a chance that I could not miss, blurring the borders between being a researcher and an informant, between outsider and insider. *They* 'left with the clothes they were wearing' (*efigamen me ta rouxa pou eforousamen*) and now *we* are going back. Twenty-eight years later the unexpected has occurred. I have finally gone to Larnakas, the first time at the end of April 2003 and since then several times in the summer. The first impression was as if time did not exist anymore. The past twenty-eight years have crumbled under time, because 'everything was as they left it' (*itan opos to afisame*). I have been taken by the hand and shown the smallest changes in detail. I was scared of so many emotions. This confrontation is still dazzling in my head.

Writing into the village's heart

Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story.

(Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989: 119)

4. *Lefkosia* is the Greek name for Nicosia.

5. *Lacharopetra* is the name of a rock and the surrounding area. The Larnatsjiotes told me several stories about the *Lacharopetra*. Some were connected to history, some to mythology and of course to their own memories. One myth tells that each Easter the *Lacharopetra* opens and that a treasure can be found there.

6. *To Kypriako* (*Provlina*) is the Cyprus Problem.

I feel I have to write about this, now that this process of returning is at its most gripping. The autobiographical element steals willy-nilly into this story. Being the daughter of a Larnatsjiotis I experience this return from the inside. A Larnatsjiotis corrects me every time I ask him something about ‘his village’. It became a one-liner between us: ‘Don’t say your village (*to chorio sas*), say *our* village (*to chorio mas*)’. Another villager encouraged me to write about Larnakas because ‘you have to know where you come from in order to know where you are going (*prepi na kseris pothen erkesai gia na kseris pou pienis*)’.

Can I capture these stories, their very personal epiphanies making them extremely vulnerable, and force them into a scientific frame? Do I need to veil their stories? What do I want this writing on Larnakas to be? Not a bitter lament, no romantic nostalgia, not a strict scientific account. I refer to anthropologists as Ruth Behar (1996; 2003) who started writing as a broken-hearted ethnographer in the same vein as Dorothy Allison:

When I sit down to make my stories I know very well that I want to take the reader by the throat, break her heart, and heal it again. With that intention I cannot sort out myself, say this part is for the theorist, this for the poet, this for the editor, and this for the wayward ethnographer who only wants to document my experience. (Dorothy Allison, 1994)⁷

I attempt to write *in-between* literature and ethnography, as I belong *in-between* identities, shifting in this piece from the anthropologist to the Larnatsjiotissa. Therefore I freed some stories from my anthropologist’s field journal, stories that normally remain silent. Ethnographic observations and personal experiences are interwoven. This essay can be read as an impressionist tale drawing on my experiences of going to Larnakas, of crossing ‘the’ border and consequently many borders.⁸

I want to find the village’s heart. Through these words I want to voice those who feel a need to belong in Larnakas. Follow me into the village’s heart, the heart that is still pumping blood.

Nothing compares to our village⁹

What does it mean to be an exile? How does exile alter someone? How does it reinvent one?

What is exile? When does it go away? Does it ever go away?

(André Aciman, 1999: 9)

Does exile ever go away? No, it does not. The Larnatsjiotes convinced me that it never goes away. Whilst narrating their nostalgia the Larnatsjiotes often claimed that they remember the village as ‘if it was yesterday’ and that ‘no single detail left them the past thirty years’. They try to explain me over and over again that time does not exist when you live in exile. An older Larnatsjiotissa made it clear that I should not doubt her memory: ‘I remember [everything] as if it was a film I am watching (*athimoumai ta san einai tenia*

7. Cited in Behar (1996: 161).

8. This paper employs a double narrative. Next to the main text there is a pictorial narrative that gives some more background on the Larnatsjiotes’ various return visits to their village.

9. Although I use the term ‘exile’ in this section, I want to emphasize the difference between the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘exile’. The Larnatsjiotes perceive themselves as refugees (*prosfyges*), because they were forced to leave their village. One Larnatsjiotissa told me: ‘We lost everything and even more than that. You have to live the situation in order to understand it.’

tsje thoro ta)'. At times, their stories were unexpectedly emotional, like the time Antonis started telling me about his village:

Everybody loves the place where he is born. I have memories from the moment I was born until I was 26 years old and we had to leave Larnakas. I have too many memories [*A long silence*]. Friends, I went to school there [*A long silence*]. The whole scenery, mountains, the home [sic]... It was a special... I mean, I don't think it was special because it was my village. It was... I mean, our house it was at the bottom of the mountains and in front of the house were the fields. It was very nice. I remember everything of the village. From the start of the village until the end. (Antonis, 54)

However, the Larnatsjiotes' stories about displacement and exile are not new. They recount the interplay between remembering, forgetting and longing, the very old story of exile that is so prominent in the twentieth century. Is it possible to recapture their place of origin through memory? Salman Rushdie (1991: 9) is convinced that emigrants 'will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost' and that they at best can 'create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands'. This paper is not about exile, it is about returning from exile. The *déracinés* who are now able to go back to their villages, to their actual homeland, to their roots.

Returning to their village means crossing the bridge Nicosia-Larnakas tis Lapithou. In actual time it only takes thirty minutes to reach the other end of the bridge, but the Larnatsjiotes also have to cross the bridge of almost thirty years imagining and storytelling about their Village of Villages. Moreover, returning is not really homecoming because their houses are the homes of others now. They have to knock the door and ask permission to enter their own house. They can only *visit* their village. Time and space both become barriers to be lifted. For the first time since 1974, there is a way to lift these barriers. However, there are still Greek Cypriots, amongst them Larnatsjiotes, who refuse to cross the border because they have to show their passports and ask permission (which comes in the form of a stamp on a one-day visa) to enter the TRNC.¹⁰ Those Cypriots who refuse to go to their villages under these circumstances often claim that they don't want to be 'tourists in their own country'. At the Agios Dhometios checkpoint Greek Cypriots hung a huge banner with the slogan 'This is not the [correct] way to return' (*Autos den einai o dromos tis epistrofis*)¹¹. A Larnatsjiotissa told me: 'I don't want to go back to my village under these circumstances. I have to show the thieves who I am and I can only have a look at my house and not get it back.'

Dimitris is one of the Larnatsjiotes who vehemently refuses to go to Larnakas. He wants to return to a 'free Larnakas'; he does not want to show his passport in order to go to his house. We all know Dimitris' reason not to go is less political than emotional. It is about fear to re-encounter his lost village. I heard a Larnatsjiotissa talking to Dimitris' daughters, convincing them that it is necessary that they would go, at least once. Her remark lingers in my head: 'I went to see, to remember, to get a fresh memory. What else

10. Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. With the exception of Turkey, nobody recognizes the TRNC.

11. In the capital of Cyprus, Nicosia, there are two checkpoints: Ledra Palace (where you can cross by foot) and Agios Dhometios (to cross by car). There are other checkpoints elsewhere on the Green Line and as time passes I assume more checkpoints will be opened.

can I get?’ Perhaps they cannot get more than just a fresh memory, but the Larnatsjiotes do try to reclaim their village in several ways

The actual border crossing, cracking the Green Line, walking through the dead zone (*nekri zoni*) in the old town of Nicosia, the intense debate on the passport issue and the question of ownership need another paper to explore.

Pilgrimage to a lost paradise

In this paper I elaborate on the ways the Larnatsjiotes recapture themselves during their return visits to Larnakas, their lost paradise, and how they express their need to belong. This 28 year period has created a kind of new mythology about this locality. It is a story of being cast out of Eden and since the yearning for their lost village.

Greek Cypriot refugees are notable for clinging with a passionate nostalgia to their village (see Loizos 1981; 2003). Consequently, their nostalgic discourses, loaded with stories about their exile and laments on their villages, became a fundamental part of their life. One Larnatsjiotis told me he wanted to be called ‘Odysseas’ in my writings on Larnakas. ‘*Odysseus, the greatest adventurer of all time, is also the greatest nostalgic*’ (Kundera, 2002:7). In a sense the Larnatsjiotes can be compared to the mythical Odysseus who went through a difficult journey, pining for his home, as the Larnatsjiotes did for almost three decades and going through the painful process of returning to the place from which they were forced to leave.

The Larnatsjiotes are undertaking a Homeric pilgrimage to their lost paradise. A pilgrimage is always a painful process and it can be seen as ‘an act of returning the displaced self to a sacred centre’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 35). A crucial element of every pilgrimage is the *movement*, in this case moving from Nicosia to Larnakas tis Lapithou. A common practice among pilgrims is to bring back a token of the journey, as an attempt to capture some of the charisma of the sacred site. ‘Some souvenir boxes actually contain material from or even fragments of the pilgrimage site in the form of natural matter to be found there such as water, earth and bits of wood or stone’ (Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 100).

The Larnatsjiotes engage in actions which are strikingly similar with pilgrim’s activities in any given religion. In what follows I will discuss the impact of locality on material matter through the Larnatsjiotes’ collecting of water and earth. They literally *moved* the field from Larnakas back to Nicosia. The return visits to Larnakas always followed an unwritten fixed route. The whole journey itself is turned into a ritual, stopping at the same places time and again: the fountains, their own house, the cemetery and the monastery.

You should drink this water!

In my MA dissertation I wrote about the natural elements that were always present in the Larnatsjiotes’ memories (Dikomititis 2003). Even before I went to Larnakas I knew that the fields, the animals, the trees and the water were important for them. The Larnatsjiotes spoke frequently about the *vrises* (fountains) in the centre of the village, which was in congruence with the many references to ‘the water’ in their stories about Larnakas. Stavros (54) mentioned immediately the water when I asked him why he liked Larnakas so much: ‘There was cold running water (*eiche nero krio, treksimio*), it was coming from the sources in the mountain’. Also Finikou (77) liked the water and she told me several times she misses ‘our water (*to nero*

mas)’ the most: ‘Over there was running water (*tsiame itan to nero pou etreshen*).’ My informants described me time after time how they had to get water from the nearest fountain and bring it to their homes. Anastasia (62) told me they used the plastic jerry cans from the English to bring water.¹² Next to the *vrises* there are more associations with collecting water: the *deksameni* (water reservoir) and the *nteposito nerou* (water tanks) which are mentioned on several maps the refugees drew. Antonis remembers vividly how he had to get water and he laughs with me, the naive anthropologist, asking if he had to bring water *every* day:

A: We had a lot of water in several places [in the village]. In our house, we didn’t have water. When the water ran out, we had to bring the water with these tanks from the *vrises* (fountains). I remember I was seven years, I had to bring the water to wash myself or [for] my family and for my mother to cook.

LD: Every day?

A: [*He laughs*] You need water every day! In other more advanced villages, they had the water distributed to the houses. We didn’t have that.



Figure 1: The *vrises* (fountains) in the centre of Larnakas tis Lapithou

Consequently, when we went to Larnakas, an emotional stop was at the fountains (*vrises*) (see figure 1). A Larnatsjiotissa exclaimed, with tears in her eyes: ‘I would give all my money to have this water in Nicosia! *Panageia mou!*’ Everybody had to drink from the water and bathe in the fountain’s water. ‘You should drink this water! It is the best water! This is the purest water there is! Drink some!’ This was a very moving scene, the Larnatsjiotes who were so emotional to be able to drink as well as bathe in their own water. It almost seemed a rite of purification.

Every Larnatsjiotis, without one single exception, filled jerry cans, small containers and bottles with ‘their’ water (see figure 2). They would collect water for themselves and for those who could not come to Larnakas or who refused to come because of the political situation. The Larnatsjiotes spent a lot of time at the

12. Cyprus was a British colony from 1880 until 1960.

fountains, encouraging their children to drink the water from Larnakas (see figure 3). Everybody was full of praise for this water.



Figure 2: Taking water back to Nicosia



Figure 3: A second-generation Larnatsjiotis follows his parents in bathing with fountain water

Almost as a ritual, I see the Larnatsjiotes upon every return visit bathing their faces with the water, drinking it, collecting it. On one occasion I saw a Greek Cypriot at the fountains filling a huge jerry can with fountain water. I asked him if he was a Larnatsjiotis. He told me that his father-in-law was from Larnakas, but refused to come under the present circumstances. He came to take his father-in-law his beloved water.

When I asked Aleksandra (33) why they take water from the village back home, she told me ‘water means life for us’. For the Larnatsjiotes this water is not just ordinary water, they are giving it a spiritual meaning. Especially by anointing themselves with the fountain’s water the Larnatsjiotes are sacralizing it. Through this collecting and praising of water they are essentializing their place of origin and following the cultural logic of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Sacred soil

The land has no handles for them to take it on their shoulders and leave. (I gis den exei krikelia gia na thn paroun ston omo kai na fygoun). (Note written on a commemorative tablet at the Aghios Dhometios checkpoint.

Next to water, the Larnatsjiotes were also taking fruits from their ‘own’ gardens and some soil from specific places back home.



Figure 4: Collecting soil from where the *teratsia* once grew

My aunt Ireni collected some soil from the place where the *teratsia* once grew (see figure 4).¹³ The *teratsia* was a huge tree in front of my grandparent’s house. Naturally there was more than one carob tree in the village. However, those Larnatsjiotes living in the upper part of the village know which tree is referred to when somebody is talking about ‘the *teratsia*’. Allegedly the tree was known by the whole *geitonia* (neighbourhood). Here is how Ireni (she was 14 years old at the time of the Turkish invasion) remembers this tree. She told me that she remembers the *teratsia* because of the games they were playing:

I remember some stupid games we were doing. I was the only girl amongst six brothers. I had to be like a boy. Like going over a barrel, climbing on a barrel and doing like a horse. [*She laughs*] You know... Running around. Climbing up to *teratsia*. You know, the tree. (Ireni, 44)

On another occasion, Ireni referred to the *teratsia* talking about a recurring dream. The dream is about a Larnatsjiotis, Kyriacos, who had the possibility in 1997 to visit the occupied parts in Cyprus and he passed through his village. Kyriacos saw Ireni’s house and the *teratsia*.

LD: Is it a good dream or a bad dream?

I: A good dream. I don’t see why. But this is very nice: when Kyriacos went to the other side... That was... I was more scared when he went to the other side [when he visited Larnakas]... For some reasons I did not trust the Turks. I was sure they would recognize him and take him to prison.

LD: Recognize him?

I: Yes, by his name and that he is a Cypriot. I was more scared for him than when the actual war happened. Anyway.... I dream about the house and about the *teratsia* everybody is talking about... The *teratsia*. The tree. Half of the tree was missing in my dream and from what Kyriacos told us it was true! They cut the half tree. And that was a bit... [*Long pause*] In my dream... You know, like that, I was actually there.

This excerpt clearly shows that refugees—here Ireni and Kyriacos—also talk amongst themselves about the trees in the village since Ireni knew in what state the *teratsia* was even before she went to Larnakas. The *teratsia*. The tree as ‘their symbolic roof’, as one of my informants described they felt protected by the

13. *Teratsia* is the Cypriot dialect for *charoupia* (carob tree). This tree stays green all year round. It has dark brown fruit.

teratsia. The tree was now completely gone and everybody was talking about it. How huge the tree had been, where exactly the tree had grown, how long it had been there. One Larnatsjiotis said that it could only have been cut recently; he still could see some of the roots.

Back in Nicosia, Ireni put the soil from the *teratsia* in a glass and took me to the cemetery in Aghios Dhometios where her mother, my grandmother Olymbia, is buried. Ireni put the soil of the *teratsia* on her grave (see figure 5). She told me it was important, so that her mother was in some sense re-united with her father and with the place she belongs to, Larnakas. Ireni kept a part of the soil. She told me it is a way of remembering the village: ‘It is a part of me, a part of my past life’.



Figure 5: Ireni puts the soil from Larnakas on her mother's grave

My father collected some soil from his father's grave on the cemetery in Larnakas. He put the soil in a plastic bag and gave it to his sister Anastasia, who did not want to return to Larnakas after the very intense re-encounter with her house in April.



Figure 6: Collecting soil at the local cemetery



Figure 7: Collecting soil at the local cemetery

In concluding I have a closer look at a specific pilgrimage site in Larnakas, namely the monastery of *Panagia tis Katharon*. The Larnatsjiotes reclaimed this sacred site through making some changes to the interior of the building.

Reclaiming the monastery



Figure 8: Monastery *Panagia ton Katharon*

On the first visit to Larnakas, in April 2003, the Larnatsjiotes found the monastery *Panagia ton Katharon* (see figure 8), located just outside the village, in very bad condition. All the paint and icons were gone and the bare walls had been vandalized (see figure 9). What had once been a Greek-Orthodox religious site had been transformed into a hiding place for young lovers and bored teenagers who left their marks in the form of rubbish and graffiti.

On one summer day two Larnatsjiotes decided to go to Larnakas and paint one wall of the monastery white in order to restore the *iconostasis*¹⁴ and have one pure corner in the monastery. They did not paint over a slogan, some well known lines for Greek Cypriots, that a Larnatsjiotis had written on the wall: ‘I don’t forget and I fight (*Den ksechno kai agonizomai*)’. This corner wall of the monastery has since been decorated with icons, candles and flowers (see figure 10).

14. The *iconostasis* (“icon-stand”) is the most prominent feature of an orthodox church, typically consisting of one or more rows of icons and a set of Royal doors in the centre. The *iconostasis* may be literally a wall decorated with icons.



Figure 9: The monastery since 1974



Figure 10: Two Larnatsjiotes painted a wall in the summer of 2003

On one day a Larnatsjiotis reported that the icons had disappeared. The next time we went to the village we found the icons in a plastic carrier bag from a Turkish shop at the entrance of the monastery. The Larnatsjiotes told me it is a miracle that the thief brought the icons back and not simply threw them away. It is with the ‘strength of God’ that the icons returned.

On Monday 8 September the Larnatsjiotes brought everything (*livani*¹⁵, water, oil, candles, matches, icons) to prepare the monastery for the celebration of the *Panagia* (mother of God).¹⁶ They were acting hasty as if they were afraid somebody would stop them from celebrating and praying. There was tension in the air. Nervousness. When the corner of the monastery was ‘ready’ they gathered in a semicircle and started singing some prayers dedicated to the *Panagia*. They were the saddest prayers I have ever heard. A group of lamenting women in a bare monastery. Claiming their *Panagia*, their church, their past, their lives (see figures 11 and 12).

15. *Livani* is incense which is put in a censer (*livanistiri*). This produces an aromatic smoke and it is used during orthodox ceremonies.

16. Cleaning the *iconostasis*, lighting the candles and preparing the *livani*.



Figure 11: Venerating the icons



Figure 12: Praying on 8 September, feast of *Panagia ton Katharon*

Conclusion

In this paper I analysed some ways this Cypriot field can be perceived as *moving*. First, my ethnographic field moved from Nicosia, where I looked at the Larnatsjiotes' memories, to the actual village of Larnakas tis Lapithou. On their return visits to Larnakas I was a participant-observer and encountered the different ways in which the Larnatsjiotes re-establish who they are in this particular locality. Second, the shift from the imagined village to the actual village was a very intense and moving experience for the Larnatsjiotes. All the feelings they had over the past decades were manifested during this return 'home'. Third, the Larnatsjiotes themselves moved the field by bringing back tokens from their village such as water, soil and fruit, in the same vein as many pilgrims bring back a keepsake from the sacred site they visited.

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